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OFFICE OF PETITIONS

In re Application of :
Carmichael et al. :
Application No. 09/710,690 :
Filing or 371(c) Date: 11/10/2000 : **ON PETITION**
Title of Invention: :
METHODS AND SYSTEMS FOR :
DISTRIBUTING PRODUCTS VIA A :
WIDE-AREA NETWORK SUCH AS :
THE INTERNET :

This is a decision on the petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a), filed October 30, 2006, to revive the above-identified application. The delay in treating this petition is regretted.

This Petition is hereby **dismissed**.

Any further petition to revive the above-identified application must be submitted within TWO (2) MONTHS from the mail date of this decision. Extensions of time under 37 CFR 1.136(a) are permitted. The reconsideration request should include a cover letter entitled "Request for Reconsideration of Petition under [insert the applicable code section]". This is **not** final agency action within the meaning of 5 U.S.C. § 704.

Background

The above-identified application became abandoned for failure to timely and properly reply to the non-final Office action, mailed May 23, 2002. The Office action set a three (3) month period for reply from the mail date of the Office action. Extensions of time were available under 37 CFR 1.136(a). No reply having been received, the application became abandoned on August 24, 2002. A Notice of Abandonment was mailed December 26, 2002.

The instant petition

Applicant files the instant petition and states that the delay in filing a reply to the office action was unavoidable because, despite diligent effort to continue prosecution of the application, the

Law Firm of Lyon & Lyon dissolved, and [Applicants] choice of another firm was unwilling and/or unable to represent Applicant. Applicant(s) contend that their second law firm could not proceed without the contents of the entire file.

In support of these assertions, Applicant provides the Declaration of Connie Jordan, a member of International Apparel Group, LLC, Inc. ("International"). Office records reveal that International Apparel Group, LLC is the assignee of the application.

Ms. Jordan states in her Declaration that "[o]n or about August 2002 she received a phone call informing [her] that Lyon & Lyon had begun going through the process of disbanding their partnership and liquidating." Declaration at p.2.

On or about March 2003 International had an employee pick-up four boxes of their client files. International at that time was unaware that all of their files had not been provided. Id. Nor was International provided with a manifest or other listing to enable International to determine whether all of its files had been transferred. Id. At p.3.

Declarant further provides that about July 2003 the law firm of Ardell & St, George examined the client files and discovered the files were incomplete and withdrew their representation. Id., at p.4. Declarant asserts that through late May through July 2003 she attempted, unsuccessfully, to contact Lyon & Lyon to obtain the missing files. Id. Also in May, 2003, International moved and filed a change of correspondence address with this Office. (Office records do not indicate that a change of correspondence address was filed in this application in 2003). Applicant(s) state that they were unsure as to whether filing a change of address was with this office was necessary. Id.

Declarant states that around July, 2004, Applicant received a copy of a pending Bankruptcy action from the Trustee, whom she contacted to inform him about the missing files, and files she had that belonged to other parties. She states that she was informed that all files of Lyon & Lyon were in a downtown Los Angeles office. Declarant says that she was never able to get the files." Id., at p.5. Declarant does not state why she was never able to get the files, and believed "that the only way that [she] could find out the current status of [her] files was to find the actual files." Id. Declarant recalls that her previous attorney at Ardell & St. George informed her that "the patent application process could not be continued without complete files."

Declarant states that around May of 2005 she was introduced to her new attorney, Mr. Harris, who informed Declarant that he could get the files. Mr. Harris subsequently obtained the files and Declarant asked Mr. Harris to diligently proceed with efforts to revive the application. Id., at p.6.

A Grantable Petition Under 37 CFR 1.137(a)

A grantable petition to revive an abandoned application under 37 CFR 1.137(a) must be accompanied by: (1) the required reply (unless previously filed), which may met by the filing of

a notice of appeal and the requisite fee; a continuing application; an amendment or request for reconsideration which *prima facie* places the application in condition for allowance, or a first or second submission under 37 CFR 1.129(a) if the application has been pending for at least two years as of June 8, 1995, taking into account any reference made in such application to any earlier filed application under 35 USC 120, 121 and 365(c); (2) the petition fee as set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(l); (3) a showing to the satisfaction of the Director that the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(a) was unavoidable; and (4) any terminal disclaimer (and fee as set forth in 37 CFR 1.20(d)) required pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(c).

Applicant lacks item (3) as set forth above.

Applicable Law, Rules and MPEP

As to item (3), Applicant must provide a showing to the satisfaction of the Director that the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(a) was unavoidable. In order to determine whether the delay was unavoidable, the courts have adopted a “reasonably prudent person” standard. The courts have provided that:

The word unavoidable’ . . . is applicable to ordinary human affairs, and requires no more or greater care or diligence than is generally used and observed by prudent and careful men in relation to their most important business. It permits them in the exercise of this care to rely upon the ordinary and trustworthy agencies of mail and telegraph, worthy and reliable employees, and such other means and instrumentalities as are usually employed in such important business. If unexpectedly, or through the unforeseen fault or imperfection of these agencies and instrumentalities, there occurs a failure, it may properly be said to be unavoidable, all other conditions of promptness in its rectification being present.

In re Mattullath , 38 App. D.C. 497, 514-15 (1912)(quoting Pratt, 1887 Dec. Comm’r Pat. 31, 32-33 (1887)); see also Winkler v. Ladd, 221 F. Supp. 550, 552, 138 USPQ 666, 667-68 (D.D.C. 1963), aff’d, 143 USPQ 172 (D.C. Cir. 1963); Ex parte Henrich, 1913 Dec. Comm’r Pat. 139, 141 (1913). In addition, decisions on revival are made on a “case-by-case basis, taking all the facts and circumstances into account.” Smith v. Mossinghoff, 671 F.2d 533, 538, 213 USPQ 977, 982 (D.C. Cir. 1982). Finally, a petition cannot be granted where a petitioner has failed to meet his or her burden of establishing that the delay was “unavoidable.” Haines v. Quigg, 673 F. Supp. 314, 316-17, 5 USPQ2d 1130, 1131-32 (N.D. Ind. 1987).

Delay resulting from the lack of knowledge or improper application of the patent statute, rules of practice or the MPEP, however, does not constitute “unavoidable” delay. See Haines, 673 F. Supp. at 317, 5 USPQ2d at 1132; Vincent v. Mossinghoff, 230 USPQ 621, 624 (D.D.C. 1985); Smith v. Diamond, 209 USPQ 1091 (D.D.C. 1981); Potter v. Dann, 201 USPQ 574 (D.D.C. 1978); Ex parte Murray, 1891 Dec. Comm’r Pat. 130, 131 (1891). For example, as 37 CFR 1.116 and 1.135(b) are manifest that proceedings concerning an amendment after final rejection will

a notice of appeal and the requisite fee; a continuing application; an amendment or request for reconsideration which *prima facie* places the application in condition for allowance, or a first or second submission under 37 CFR 1.129(a) if the application has been pending for at least two years as of June 8, 1995, taking into account any reference made in such application to any earlier filed application under 35 USC 120, 121 and 365(c); (2) the petition fee as set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(l); (3) a showing to the satisfaction of the Commissioner that the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(a) was unavoidable; and (4) any terminal disclaimer (and fee as set forth in 37 CFR 1.20(d)) required pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(c).

Applicant lacks item (3) as set forth above.

Applicable Law, Rules and MPEP

As to item (3), Applicant must provide a showing to the satisfaction of the Commissioner that the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(a) was unavoidable. In order to determine whether the delay was unavoidable, the courts have adopted a “reasonably prudent person” standard. The courts have provided that:

The word unavoidable’ . . . is applicable to ordinary human affairs, and requires no more or greater care or diligence than is generally used and observed by prudent and careful men in relation to their most important business. It permits them in the exercise of this care to rely upon the ordinary and trustworthy agencies of mail and telegraph, worthy and reliable employees, and such other means and instrumentalities as are usually employed in such important business. If unexpectedly, or through the unforeseen fault or imperfection of these agencies and instrumentalities, there occurs a failure, it may properly be said to be unavoidable, all other conditions of promptness in its rectification being present.

In re Mattullath, 38 App. D.C. 497, 514-15 (1912)(quoting Pratt, 1887 Dec. Comm’r Pat. 31, 32-33 (1887)); see also Winkler v. Ladd, 221 F. Supp. 550, 552, 138 USPQ 666, 667-68 (D.D.C. 1963), aff’d, 143 USPQ 172 (D.C. Cir. 1963); Ex parte Henrich, 1913 Dec. Comm’r Pat. 139, 141 (1913). In addition, decisions on revival are made on a “case-by-case basis, taking all the facts and circumstances into account.” Smith v. Mossinghoff, 671 F.2d 533, 538, 213 USPQ 977, 982 (D.C. Cir. 1982). Finally, a petition cannot be granted where a petitioner has failed to meet his or her burden of establishing that the delay was “unavoidable.” Haines v. Quigg, 673 F. Supp. 314, 316-17, 5 USPQ2d 1130, 1131-32 (N.D. Ind. 1987).

Delay resulting from the lack of knowledge or improper application of the patent statute, rules of practice or the MPEP, however, does not constitute “unavoidable” delay. See Haines, 673 F. Supp. at 317, 5 USPQ2d at 1132; Vincent v. Mossinghoff, 230 USPQ 621, 624 (D.D.C. 1985); Smith v. Diamond, 209 USPQ 1091 (D.D.C. 1981); Potter v. Dann, 201 USPQ 574 (D.D.C. 1978); Ex parte Murray, 1891 Dec. Comm’r Pat. 130, 131 (1891). For example, as 37 CFR 1.116 and 1.135(b) are manifest that proceedings concerning an amendment after final rejection will

not operate to avoid abandonment of the application in the absence of a timely and proper appeal, a delay is not “unavoidable” when the applicant simply permits the maximum extendable statutory period for reply to a final Office action to expire while awaiting a notice of allowance or other action. Likewise, as a “reasonably prudent person” would file papers or fees in compliance with 37 CFR 1.8 or 1.10 to ensure their timely filing in the USPTO, as well as preserve adequate evidence of such filing, a delay caused by an applicant’s failure to file papers or fees in compliance with 37 CFR 1.8 and 1.10 does not constitute “unavoidable” delay. See Krahn, 15 USPQ2d at 1825. Finally, a delay caused by an applicant’s lack of knowledge or improper application of the patent statute, rules of practice or the MPEP is not rendered “unavoidable” due to: (A) the applicant’s reliance upon oral advice from USPTO employees; or (B) the USPTO’s failure to advise the applicant of any deficiency in sufficient time to permit the applicant to take corrective action. See In re Sivertz, 227 USPQ 255, 256 (Comm’r Pat. 1985).

35 U.S.C. 133 and 151 each require a showing that the “delay” was “unavoidable,” which requires not only a showing that the delay which resulted in the abandonment of the application was unavoidable, but also a showing of unavoidable delay until the filing of a petition to revive. See In re Application of Takao, 17 USPQ2d 1155 (Comm’r Pat. 1990). The burden of continuing the process of presenting a grantable petition in a timely manner likewise remains with the applicant until the applicant is informed that the petition is granted. Id. at 1158. Thus, an applicant seeking to revive an “unavoidably” abandoned application must cause a petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a) to be filed without delay (i.e., promptly upon becoming notified, or otherwise becoming aware, of the abandonment of the application).

An applicant who fails to file a petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a) “promptly” upon becoming notified, or otherwise becoming aware, of the abandonment of the application will not be able to show that the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(a) was unavoidable. The removal of the language in 37 CFR 1.137(a) requiring that any petition thereunder be “promptly filed after the applicant is notified of, or otherwise becomes aware of, the abandonment” should not be viewed as: (A) permitting an applicant, upon becoming notified, or otherwise becoming aware, of the abandonment of the application, to delay the filing of a petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a); or (B) changing (or modifying) the result in In re Application of S, 8 USPQ2d 1630 (Comm’r Pat. 1988), in which a petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a) was denied due to the applicant’s deliberate deferral in filing a petition under 37 CFR 1.137. An applicant who deliberately chooses to delay the filing of a petition under 37 CFR 1.137 (as in Application of S, 8 USPQ2d at 1632) will not be able to show that “the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to [37 CFR 1.137(a)] was unavoidable” or even make an appropriate statement that “the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to [37 CFR 1.137(b)] was unintentional.”

Analysis

The period of delay

As to item (3), Applicant is advised that she must account for the entire period of the delay in filing a GRANTABLE petition. That is, the period that Applicant must account for is from the time the application became abandoned, on August 24, 2002, until now. Applicant must explain why the delay in responding to the Office action was, since August 24, 2002, and remains, unavoidable.

Applicant has not provided any information as to when she became aware that the application was abandoned. An applicant who fails to file a petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a) “promptly” upon becoming notified, or otherwise becoming aware, of the abandonment of the application will not be able to show that the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(a) was unavoidable.

Declarant also states that around May of 2005 she was introduced to her new attorney, Mr. Harris, who informed Declarant that he could get the files. Mr. Harris subsequently obtained the files and Declarant asked Mr. Harris to diligently proceed with efforts to revive the application; however, the instant petition was not filed until 17 months after she was introduced to her new attorney. Applicant has not provided any explanation for the delay in filing the petition to revive the application.

35 U.S.C. 133 and 151 each require a showing that the “delay” was “unavoidable,” which requires not only a showing that the delay which resulted in the abandonment of the application was unavoidable, but also a showing of unavoidable delay until the filing of a petition to revive. (Emphasis supplied).

Diligence

Applicant also states that on or about March 2003, International had an employee pick-up four boxes of their client files. International at that time was unaware that all of their files had not been provided. Nor was International provided with a manifest or other listing to enable International to determine whether all of its files had been transferred.

Applicant does not provide any explanation as to why Applicant was unable to initiate an investigation into the contents of the boxes and determine whether this file – Applicant’s most important business – had been transferred. Instead, Applicant provides that approximately four (4) months later, about July 2003, the law firm of Ardell & St, George examined the client files and discovered the files were incomplete and withdrew their representation. Applicant has thus failed to demonstrate diligence in attempting to revive the application.

Applicant also provides she was informed by the Bankruptcy Trustee that all files of Lyon & Lyon were in a downtown Los Angeles office. Declarant says that she was never able to get the files, but again provides no explanation as to what efforts were made to retrieve the files – her most important business - or why she was unable to retrieve her missing files. Again, Applicant has failed to demonstrate diligence in prosecuting the application.

The test for diligence is not whether the Applicant knew that the application was abandoned, but whether she exercised due diligence to find out and correct the problem.

Lack of Knowledge

Applicant states that she was unsure as to whether filing a change of address was with this office was necessary, and that her previous attorney at Ardell & St. George informed her that the patent application process could not be continued without complete files. Applicant is reminded that delay resulting from the lack of knowledge or improper application of the patent statute, rules of practice or the MPEP, does not constitute “unavoidable” delay, and that the Patent and Trademark Office must rely on the actions or inactions of duly authorized and voluntarily chosen representatives of the applicant, and applicant is bound by the consequences of those actions or inactions.

Finally, Applicant has failed to support her assertions with any documentary evidence.

Conclusion

Petitioner has not provided a showing to the satisfaction of the Director that the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(a) was unavoidable.

Alternate venue

Applicant is strongly urged to file a petition stating that the delay was unintentional. Public Law 97-247, § 3, 96 Stat. 317 (1982), which revised patent and trademark fees, amended 35 U.S.C. § 41(a)(7) to provide for the revival of an “unintentionally” abandoned application without a showing that the delay in was “unavoidable.” An “unintentional” petition under 37 CFR 1.137(b) must be accompanied by the required fee.

The filing of a petition under 37 CFR 1.137(b) cannot be intentionally delayed and therefore must be filed promptly. A person seeking revival due to unintentional delay can not make a statement that the delay was unintentional unless the entire delay, including the delay from the date it was discovered that the application was abandoned until the filing of the petition to revive under 37 CFR 1.137(b), was unintentional. A statement that the delay was unintentional is not appropriate if petitioner intentionally delayed the filing of a petition for revive under 37 CFR 1.137(b).

Further correspondence with respect to this matter should be addressed as follows:

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